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Response Paper 3

*Beloved,* written by Toni Morrison, tells the deep and gruesome story of a past slave life. While focusing on the life of Sethe, the reader is introduced to characters that play a meaningful role in the actions and experiences of her life. Most prominently, her deceased daughter, Beloved, her living daughter, Denver, and her companion, Paul D. After escaping Sweet Home, the farm she worked on, Sethe manages to make it to 124, a house that her mother-in-law had previously obtained. Years later, after her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, has passed away, 124 is inihibted by Sethe, Denver, and Paul D. While they are all aware that Sethe’s deceased baby daughter haunts the house, a more life like version shows up one day after they attend a carnival. Even though the novel takes place in a time period after slavery is abolished, most of the characters experience intense flashbacks that help to provide the reader with information and connect different points of the novel. I argue that the Morrison makes use of flashbacks in order to voice the extreme cruelties and hardships of slavery and to display the intense emotions that were attached to such harsh lifestyles.

Toni Morrison, an African American female writer, conveys a much greater language through this novel than just a story about a ghost. She makes use of the plot and characters in order to send a message about slavery. The characters that the reader is introduced to are strategically placed and brought to life with the means of telling a story that is informational for the reader. To the author, it is important that the brutalities suffered throughout the time period of slavery are not something that is forgotten. In fact, it is something that people should be reminded of. While is it hard to read some of the descriptions and moments that characters flash back to, it is also arguable that this was Morrison’s goal in her writing. Moreover, she wants the reader to be reminded of the effects of slavery, just as the characters are. When Beloved begins to question Sethe about her own mother, this is something that Sethe had not thought about and could not remember for years. She was used to living a life consisted of blocked memories. After explaining that her mother was hanged, a memory sparked within her. She remembers Nan, another slave woman, telling her that she was the only baby her mother kept. After being raped and impregnated by multiple white men, she “threw away” all of her babies (74). Sethe remembers hearing Nan explain, “The others from more whites she also threw away. You she gave the name of a black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around” (74).

This novel is not to be taken lightly in any way. The visual and painful elements that are described are there for a historical purpose. The flashbacks mentioned allow for the author to transition from a fantasy and magical aspect, to a more historical and informational aspect. While some people may disagree with the tone and vision of this novel, I feel as though it does exactly what is needs to.